

[Mrs. Mayme Reese]

Beliefs and Customs - [?] [2?]

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NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Dorothy West

ADDRESS New York City

DATE September 21, 1938

SUBJECT Interview with Mrs. Mayme Reese.

1. Date and time of interview

September 20, 1938 - 1-4 PM

2. Place of interview

Informant's home

3. Name and address of informant

Mrs. Mayme Reese 1 St. Nicholas Terrace

4. Name and address of person, if any who put you in touch with informant.

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5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you

6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

Nicely furnished bed-living room in a five room apartment. Room is furnished with a studio couch, a covered trunk, 3 chairs, one straight and two arm chairs, a chest of drawers, and a cabinet radio.

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FORM B Personal History of Informant

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Dorothy West

ADDRESS New York City

DATE September 21, 1938

SUBJECT INTERVIEW WITH MRS. MAYME REESE

1. Ancestry

Both parents were American Negroes

2. Place and date of birth

Charleston, S.C. - April 7, 1881

3. Family

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Is living apart from 2 married sons and 1 single son, and a married daughter.

4. Places lived in, with dates

Charleston, S.C., Newberry, S.C., and New York City.

5. Education, with dates

Grammar School Educaion Education

6. Occupations and accomplishments, with dates

Always been a housewife only.

7. Special [?] interests

Weekly out-of-town visit to grandchildren

8. Community and religious activities

Member of a woman's auxiliary at St, James Presbyterian Church.

9. Description of informant: Color of a roasted almonds, gray hair, black eyes (wears glasses). Large woman; speaks with a trace of what is called the Geechie (Gullah) dialect. Has a sense of humor and is interested only in movies and the church as outside activities.

10. Other Points gained in interview

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FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

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STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Dorothy West

ADDRESS New York City

DATE September 21, 1938

SUBJECT INTERVIEW WITH MRS. MAYME REESE

I can't remember what games I played when I was a girl off-hand like this. Games and songs — I'll have to think about it and tell you the next time you come. We played almost the same games the children play today — some of them about the same, some of them different.

Did you ever hear about quilting parties? We used to have quilting parties at least twice a year. One time we would meet at one house and one time at another; you'd keep on that way until the quilt was finished.... Well, say there'd be three or four ladies who were good friends. If I was making the quilt, I'd set up the frame (quilting frame) in my house and the other two or three ladies would come to my house and spend the day quilting. I'd have it all ready for the quilting to start ... Maybe I'd have been sewing scraps together for a year until I got the cover all made. Then when my friends would come, the cover would be all ready and there wouldn't be anything to do but start working on the padding. If there were four ladies, each would take an end. (Gestures) I'd take this end, the other two would take the ends over there. You'd decide before how you were going to make the stitches. If you were going to have a curving stitch, you'd sew one way. If you were going to quilt block fashion, you'd sew that way. (Make the stitches in the pattern of a square of a size decided upon.)

The ladies who would come to help you, would come as early in the morning as they could. Sometimes you all had breakfast together. If you didn't, you had dinner together and

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a little snack off and on during the day. If it was at my house and nobody 2 was coming early enough for breakfast, I'd put something on the sideboard - the buffet - that everybody could reach if they got hungry before time to sit at the table. Sometimes there'd be sweat potatoes, some smoked pork, bread, maybe some syrup, and things like that. Then when you had dinner, there'd be the regular things everybody had at home. If somebody came way in (from the country or a town 8 or 9 miles away), they'd have supper and stay all night.

Depending upon how many quilts you needed a year or just wanted to make, there'd be that many quilting parties for ladies who were intimates. If none of my friends were going to make quilts in a year, then they'd keep coming to my house maybe twice a week until we got it finished. If you worked right along and didn't stop to talk — 'course most of the time we stopped to gossip a little - you could finish a quilt in a day or two. All that depended on the pattern, too. If somebody else was making a quilt, we'd go to their house and exchange labor 'till they got their quilt done.

Whenever we had a quilting party, the men-folks had to look out for themselves. They ate cold food if they came in hungry in the day and if we finished working some enough, they'd get their supper on time. If we didn't, they just had to wait... They didn't mind. If they fussed, we'd remind 'em 'bout keeping warm in the winter.

In the fall when they had the county fairs, sometimes we'd take our quilts out to fair-grounds for exhibition. Each lady picked out her best quilt - the prettiest color, the prettiest pattern and the best stitches - and took it to the fair to try to win the prize ... No, it didn't make any difference if your prettiest quilt had been quilted by three or four other people. You see you already had the pattern and you'd already put the pieces together so that much was your own idea. And that counted more than the help you got - and the results you got - when you were putting it on the frame. Sometimes a church club would make quilt and enter it in the name of the church. Even if they put it in the club's name, the club would give the money to the church if they won... Once I won the 3 prize for my own quilt

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and once I was one of a group that won. The prize most often five dollars. Sometimes it was ten. One year they couldn't get the money together and they gave the winner some prize preserves, some pieces of fancy-work and something else that had won first prize in other contests instead of the money ... I don't remember if that was one woman or whether it was a club. 'Course you'd rather have the money than that stuff 'cause everybody could can fruit and do tatting and crocheting and things like that and they could make their own things. But you couldn't act nasty about it. Anyhow, it didn't happen but once as I remember it.

Sometimes rich white women would hear that such and such a person had won the prize for pretty quilts and they'd come and ask that person to make them a quilt. Sometimes they'd make it and sometimes they wouldn't ... If they did make it, they'd get around five dollars ... Sometimes they'd furnish the scraps and sometimes they wouldn't. Most of the time, though, they'd buy pieces of goods and give it to the person who was making the quilt to cut up. They'd get different colors and they'd say what pattern they wanted*

Sometimes they'd have quilting parties in some of the churches. Of course not every church did that. But those that did had quite a few woman members who went to quilt ... they'd get some little boys to take the quilting frame to the church in the morning and then they'd go in the afternoon. I guess they'd quilt for two-three hours. Most of the time when they did that, they'd be making the quilt to sell to raise money for the church.

Things like that were nice. Sometimes I wish I could go back to that kind of life for awhile but times have changed so. They won't ever be like that again. But I guess it's just as well. Nowadays, there are other things to occupy people's minds.

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FORM D Extra Comment

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STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Dorothy West

ADDRESS New York City

DATE September 21, 1938

SUBJECT INTERVIEW WITH MRS. MAYME REESE.

The informant was very friendly to the interviewer and readily agreed to a second interview sometime in the future. She apparently has a very excellent memory and seems willing to reminisce. At the time of the interview, however, the informant had recently moved to her present address. It is the first time since her marriage that she has not had her own name and she was obviously in the midst of a period of difficult adjustment. Although the interview was a long one, most of the informant's conversation dealt with her own problems.

Although the informant spoke with a vestige of the Gullah dialect, the interviewer could not take it down because it was not phonetically distinct enough to note the variations. There was no trace of the "Geechie" manner of speaking so far as transposition of word order was concerned.